

Quotas

Position One: No to Quotas

As the admissions director of a large public university, you have been asked by the legislature of your state to initiate a voluntary effort to recruit minority students and to guarantee that a certain percentage of your freshman admissions will come from minority groups. This request has been protested by some student groups on campus and by several conservative groups in the community.

You believe that this kind of program, even though it has good intentions, is inherently unfair because it discriminates against innocent individuals on behalf of groups. While we have a moral obligation to help people who have been oppressed on the basis of race or class, helping them shouldn't mean discriminating against someone else on the basis of race and class.

Once we start helping people on the basis of class, you wonder, where will it end? There are several classes of people with legitimate claims of being oppressed—Appalachian whites, Jews, Asians, etc.

We also have a problem with defining what exactly they are owed. Do we owe them a minimum-wage job, admission to a public university, admission to the finest private institutions, or a high-paying job? What criteria should be used to determine the right number of positions or admissions?

Defend your position.

Position Two: Yes to Quotas

As the admissions director of a large public university you have been asked by the legislature of your state to initiate a voluntary effort to recruit minority students, and to guarantee that a certain percentage of your freshman admissions will come from minority groups. This request has been protested by some student groups on campus and by several conservative groups in the community.

You believe that the request is reasonable. There is evidence that minority groups have been unfairly denied admission to your university in the past and that there are fewer minorities at the university than in the community. It is only fair that the university redress these problems by helping members of those minority groups succeed.

These programs are not discriminatory because they are not taking from other groups anything that belongs to them. The admission positions don't belong to anyone else. There is no reason that we can't give them to people based on their race, as long as they are qualified. Even if you argue that there are people more qualified, it has never been proven that more "qualified" people necessarily do better in school or in careers after they get out.

In most professions and educational institutions people are chosen on the basis of many factors other than qualification. People are selected because of their influence, the amount of power and money they have, or because they "know someone." In this case, we are simply helping people who don't have access to that power. Even some "qualifications" are often the result of factors beyond the individual's control, such as family income and access to good education.

Defend your position.